THE ART EXHIBITION CATALOGUES OF THE SIDNEY JANIS GALLERY, NEW YORK

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List 11

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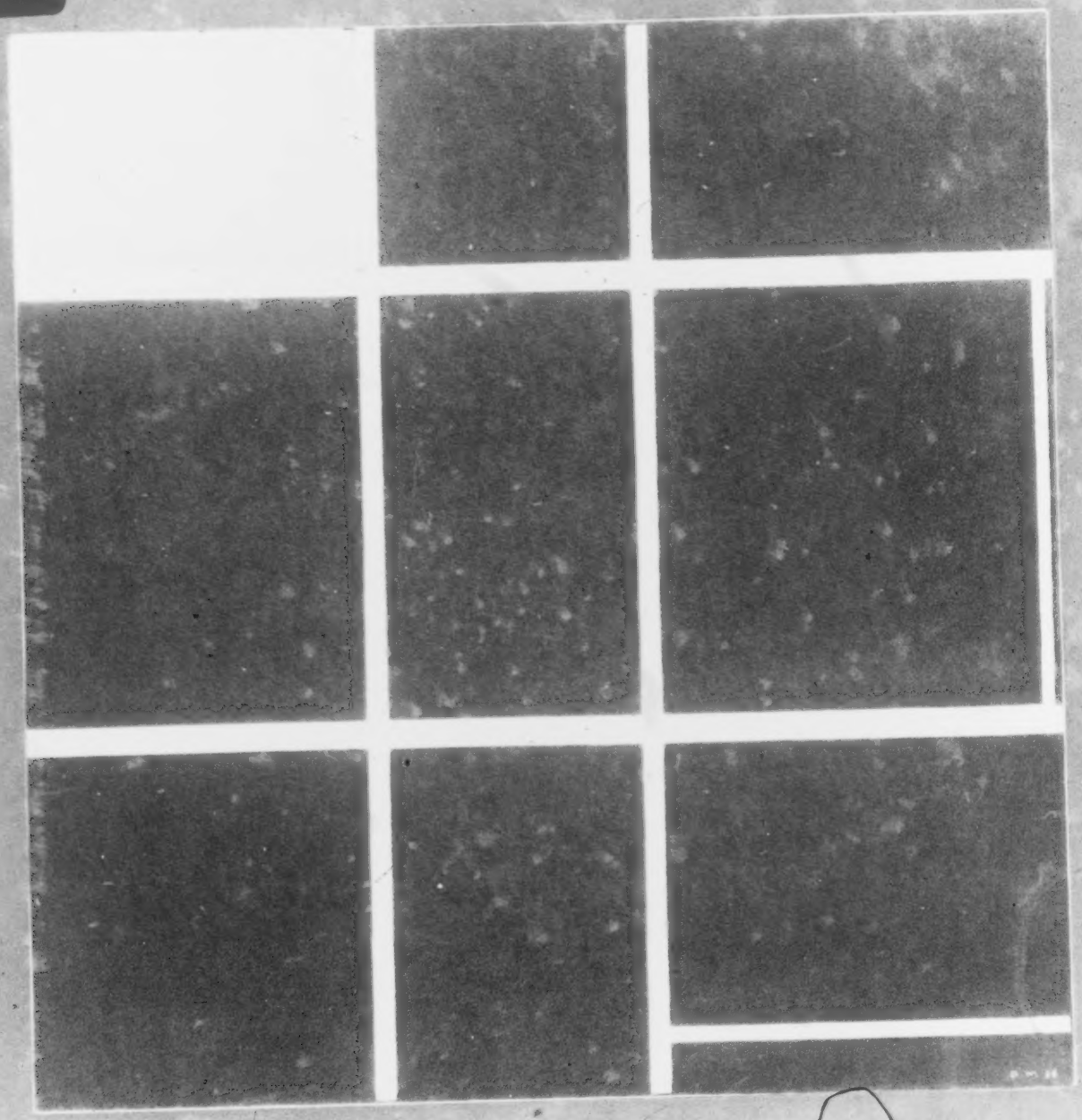


MONDRIAN

19 **Composition in White + Red** 1936 Oil 23¼ x 22¼" (Cover)

Quotations from

MONDRIAN'S WRITINGS

MONDRIAN *in his New York Studio 1942*

I began to paint at an early age . . . I often sketched by moonlight . . . flat Dutch meadows, or houses with dead, blank windows. I never painted these things romantically; but from the very beginning, I was always a realist.

I enjoyed painting flowers, not bouquets, but a single flower at a time, in order that I might better express its plastic structure.

When I first saw the work of the Impressionists, van Gogh, van Dongen, and the Fauves, I admired it. But I had to seek the true way alone.

It was during this early period of experiment that I first went to Paris. The time was around 1910 . . . I was immediately drawn to the Cubists . . . and, for a time, I was much influenced by them.

Gradually I became aware that Cubism did not accept the logical consequences of its own discoveries; it was not developing abstraction toward its ultimate goal, the expression of pure reality.

The problem was clarified for me, when I realized two things: (a) in plastic art, reality can be expressed only through the equilibrium of *dynamic movement* of form and color; (b) pure means afford the most effective way of attaining this.

I found that the right angle is the only constant relationship, and that, through the proportions of dimension, its constant expression can be given movement, that is, made *living*.

During this period of research in Paris, I made many abstract paintings of trees, houses, plants and other objects . . . But I felt that I still worked as an Impressionist and was continuing to express particular feelings, not pure reality.

More and more I excluded from my painting all curved lines, until finally my compositions consisted only

of vertical and horizontal lines, which formed crosses, each one separate and detached from the other.

Impressed by the vastness of nature, I was trying to express its expansion, rest, and unity. At the same time . . . I recognized that the equilibrium of any particular aspect of nature rests on the equivalence of its opposites.

Art has *to determine space as well as form and to create the equivalence of these two factors.*

In my early pictures, space was still a background. I began to determine forms: verticals and horizontals became rectangles. They still appeared as detached forms against a background; their color was still impure.

Feeling the lack of unity, I brought the rectangles together; space became white, black or grey; form became red, blue or yellow. Uniting the rectangles was equivalent to continuing the verticals and horizontals of the former period over the entire composition.

Later, in order to abolish the manifestation of planes as rectangles, I reduced my color and accentuated the limiting lines, crossing them one over the other. Thus the planes were not only cut and abolished, but their relationships became more active. The result was a far more dynamic expression. Here again I tested the value of destroying particularities of form and thus opening the way to a more universal construction.

In 1915, . . . (Theo van Doesburg and I) formed a small group of artists and architects: the De Stijl Group. We hoped to make the public aware of the possibilities of pure plastic art and endeavored to demonstrate its relationship to and its effect on modern life . . . Modern architecture and industry responded to our influence . . .

In our time, rhythm is more and more accentuated, not only in art, but in mechanized reality and in the whole of life. Marvelously determined and full of vitality, it is expressed in real jazz, swing, and Boogie-Woogie music and dance.*

In the metropolis, unconsciously, and in answer to the new age's needs, there has been a liberation from form, leading to the open rhythm that pervades the great city. Buildings of all kinds, lighting and advertisements contribute to it. The noise of vehicles contains opposing relationships . . .**

The Place de l'Opera in Paris gives a better image of the new life than many theories do. Its oppositional rhythm, twice repeated in two directions, realizes a living equilibrium in its exact execution.***

In plastic culture, from the remotest past down to the present, we see a growing evolution toward freedom, from the limitations of time and subjectivity. Despite cultural lags and breaks, there exists a continuous progression in the disclosure of true reality by means of the abstraction of reality's appearance.

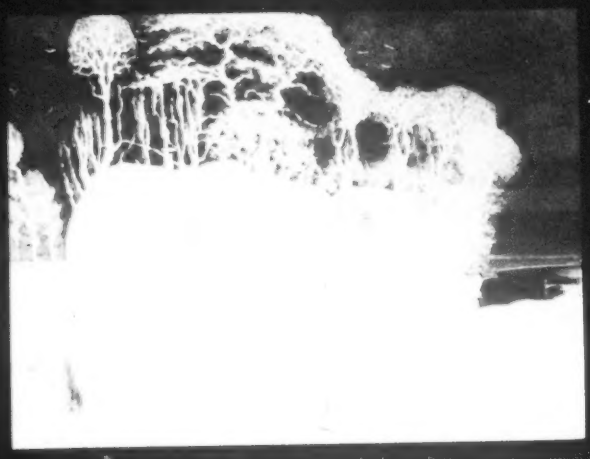
The clarification of equilibrium through plastic art is of greatest importance for humanity . . . Although tragical manifestations and feelings exist only in time, for us human beings, time is reality. Our subjective vision and experience make it impossible to be happy. But we can escape the tragical oppression through a clear vision of true reality, which exists, but which is veiled. If we cannot free *ourselves*, we can free our *vision*.*

**Plastic Art and Pure Plastic Art* by Piet Mondrian, George Wittenborn, Inc., New York, selected by Harriet Janis

***Jazz and Neoplasticism*, 1927, selected and translated by Martin James

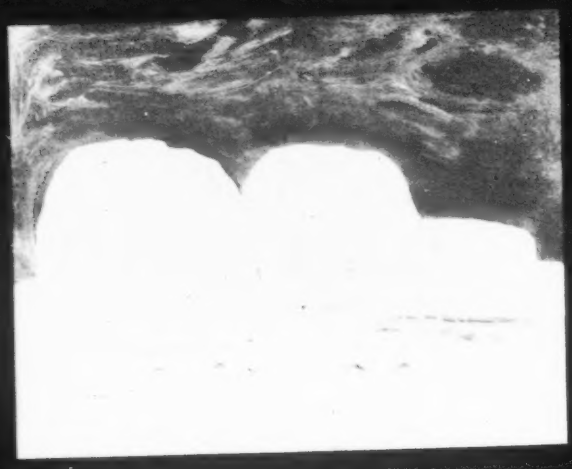
****New Art, New Life*, 1931, selected and translated by Martin James

Self Portrait ca 1900
Oil 19½ x 15" **1**



Farm Near Duivendrecht 1905
Oil 30 x 42" **2**

Chrysanthemum 1906
Oil 26½ x 16½" **3**



4 **Haystacks, Zeeland** ca 1908
Oil 13½ x 17½"

5 **Windmill in Sunlight** 1908
Oil 45½ x 34½"

6 **Eucalyptus Tree** 1910
Oil 20 x 15½"

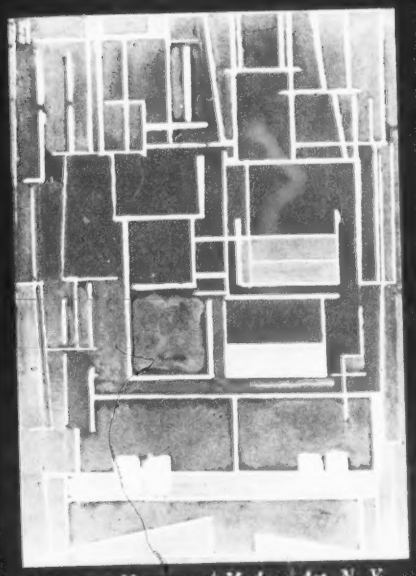
Grey Eucalyptus Tree **7**
1910 Oil 23½ x 20"

Colorplate (centerfold) **8**

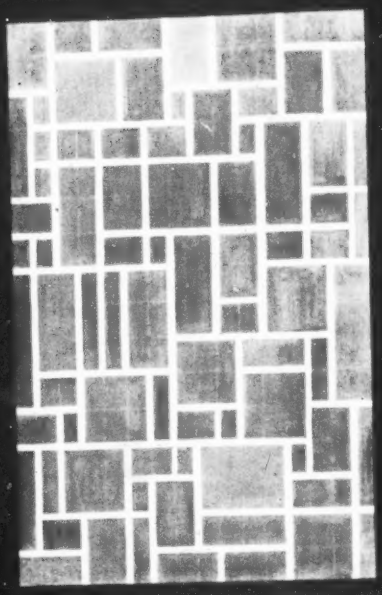
Facade 5 1914 **10**
Oil 22 x 33½"

Colorplate (centerfold) **9**

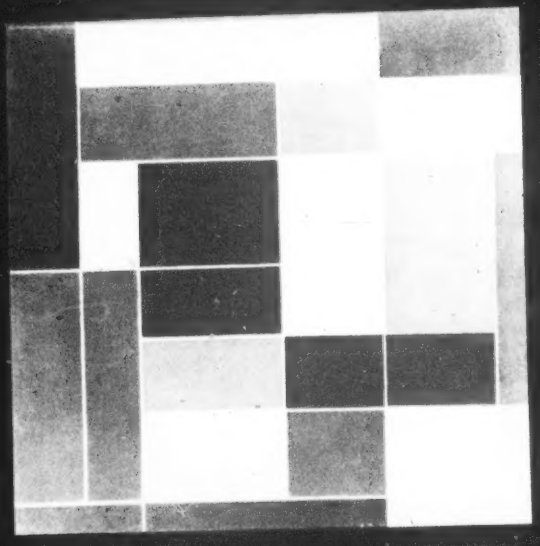
Blue Facade 1914 **11**
Oil 37¼ x 26½"



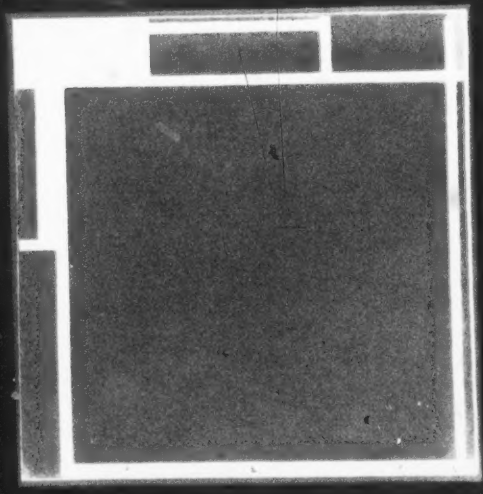
Courtesy Museum of Modern Art, N. Y.



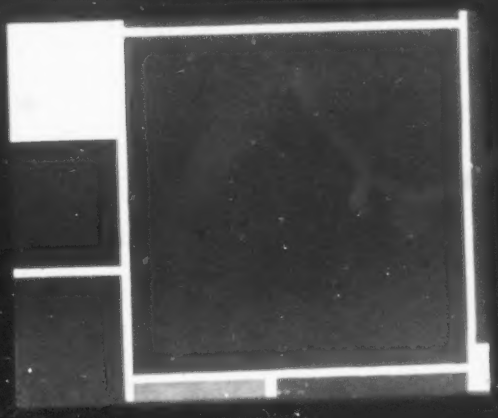
12 Composition in Grey 1919
Oil 38½ x 24½"



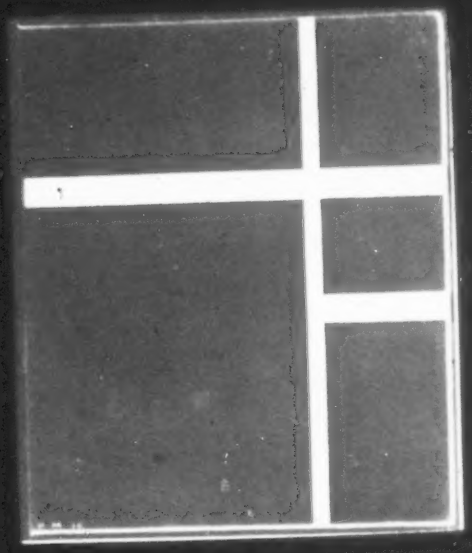
13 Composition 2 1920
Oil 39½ x 39½"



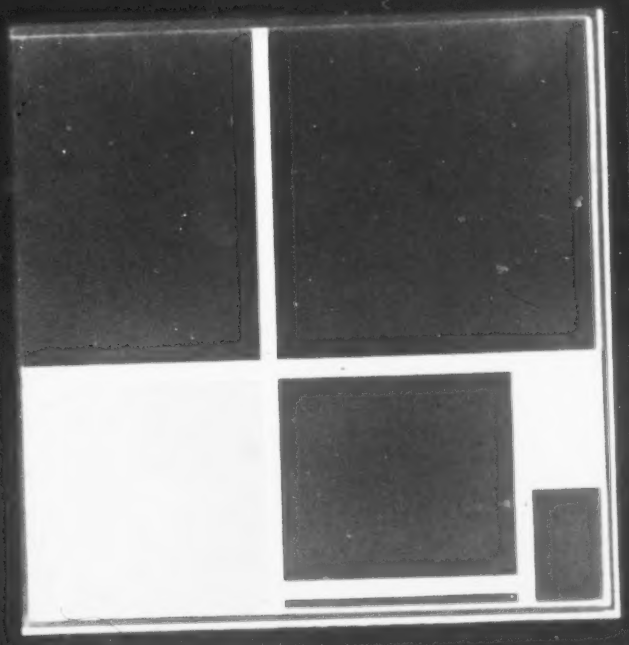
14 Square Composition 1922
Oil 21¼ x 21¼"



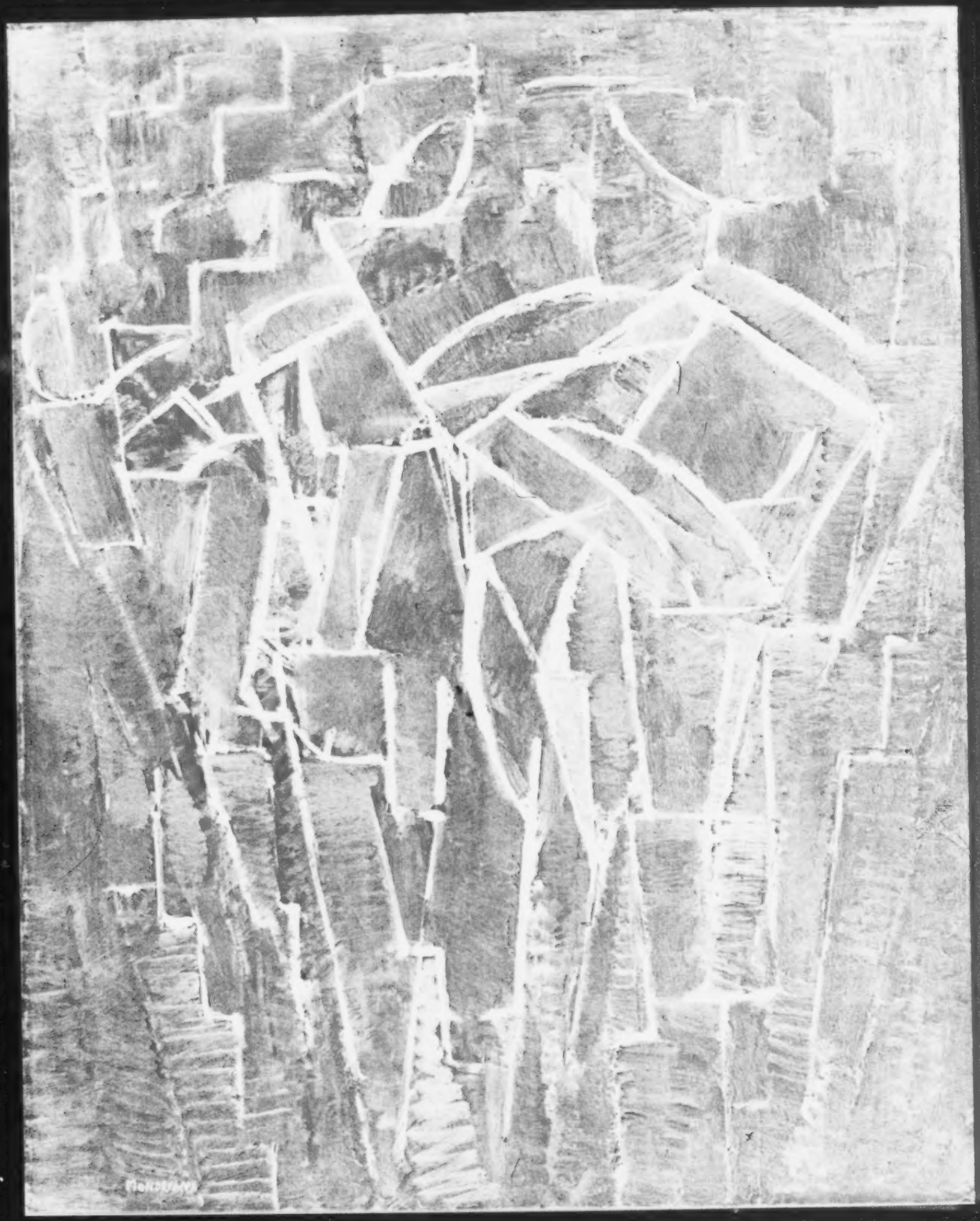
Composition 1927 **15**
Oil 15½ x 20"



Composition in Black + White 1930 **16**
Oil 16¼ x 13"



Composition in Red + Blue 1931 **17**
Oil 19¾ x 19½"

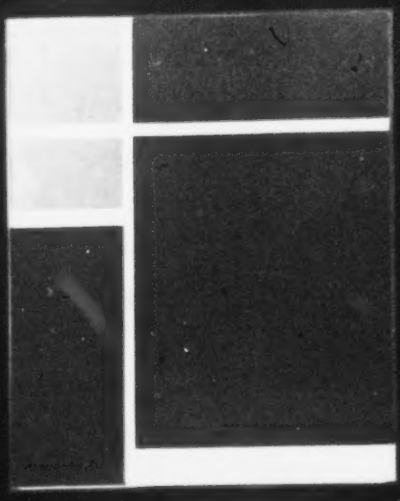


8 Eucalyptus Tree in Grey + Tan 1912 Oil 31¾ x 25½"

Colorplates 8 and 9 courtesy Harry N. Abrams, N. V., Amsterdam, Holland.

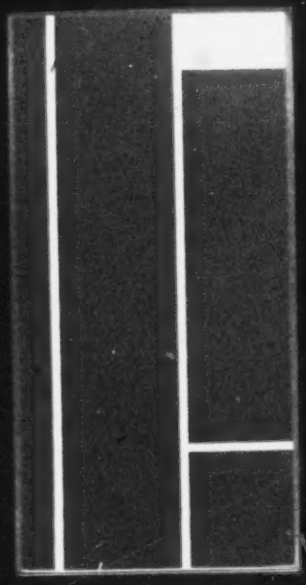
Composition 3, Trees 1912 Oil 38 x 31" **9**

Collection S. B. Slijper, courtesy Gemeente Museum, The Hague.

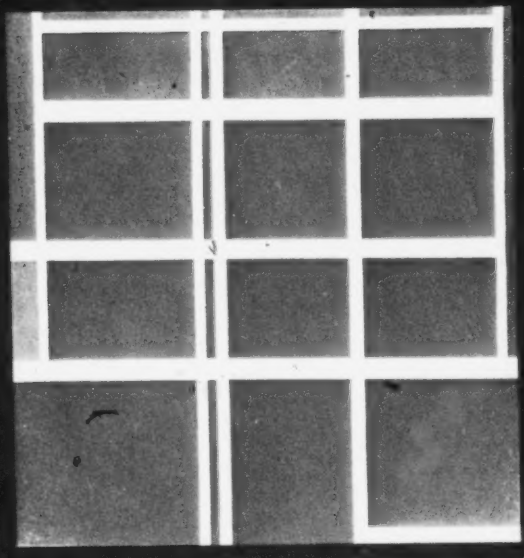


18 Composition 1933
Oil 16¼ x 13½"

19 Cover

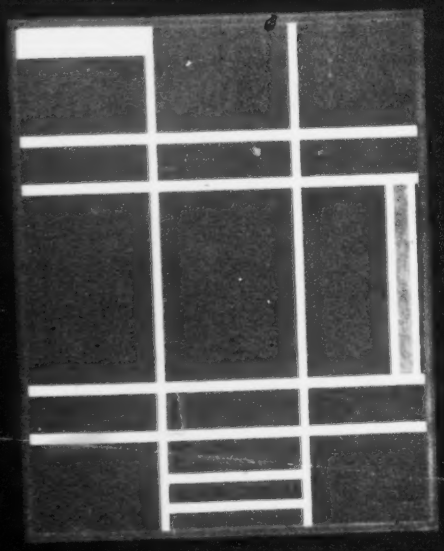


20 Composition in White + Blue 1936
Oil 47 x 23"

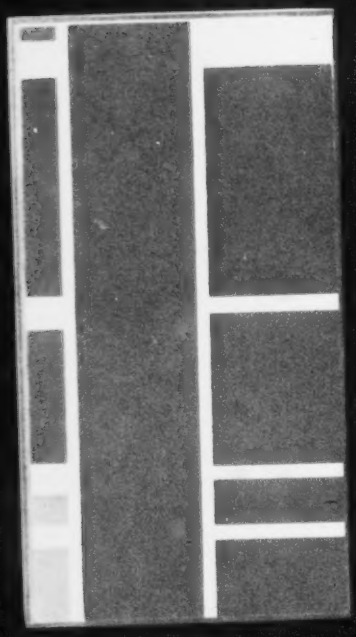


21 Composition in Yellow + Blue 1937
Oil 22¼ x 22"

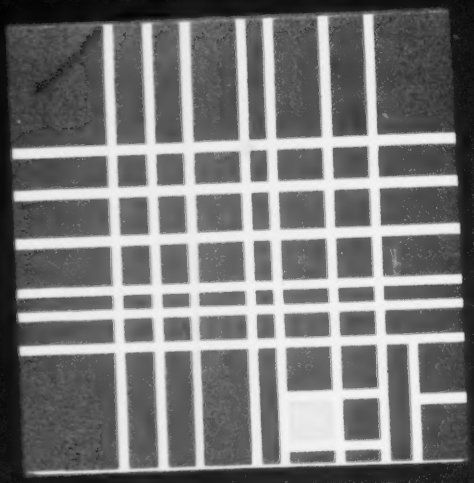
Composition in Yellow + Red 1938
Oil 31½ x 24½" **22**

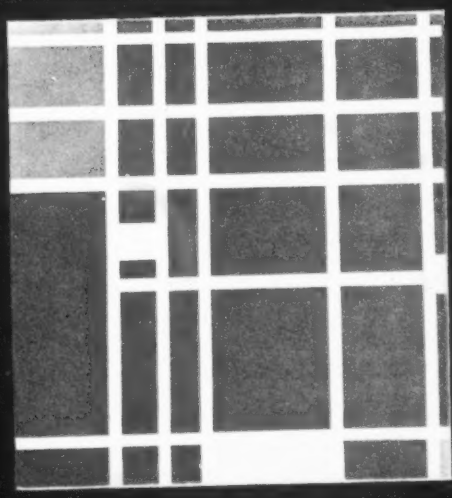


Composition in Red Yellow + Blue
1935-42 Oil 39¼ x 20¼" **23**

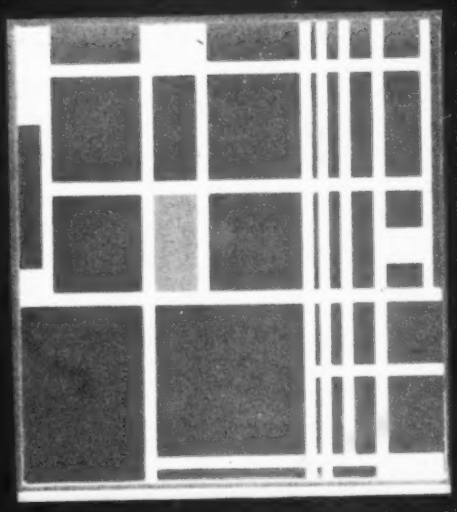


Composition II With Blue Square
1936-42 Oil 24x 24" **24**

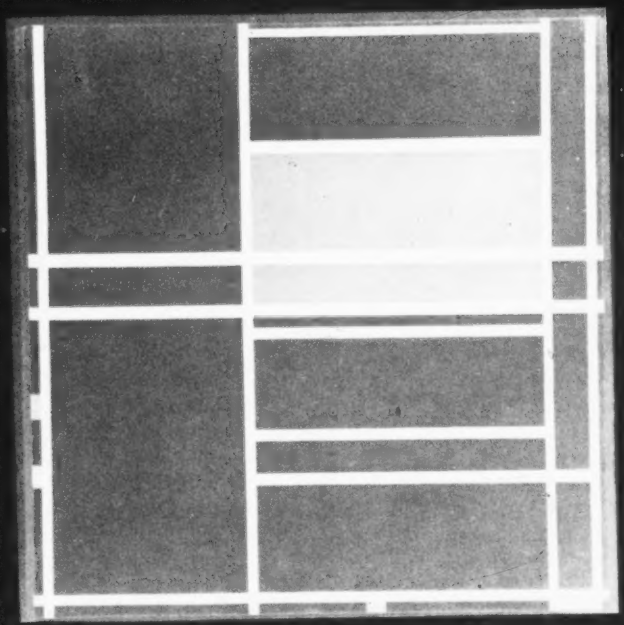




25 Composition in Red Yellow + Blue
Oil 24 x 22" 1936-43

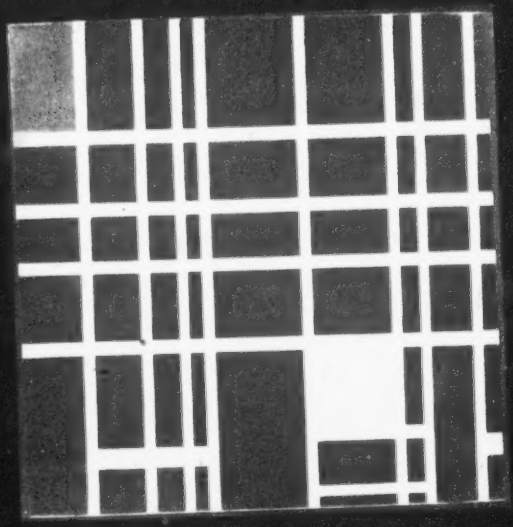


26 Composition in Red Blue + Yellow
Oil 23½ x 21½" 1937-42

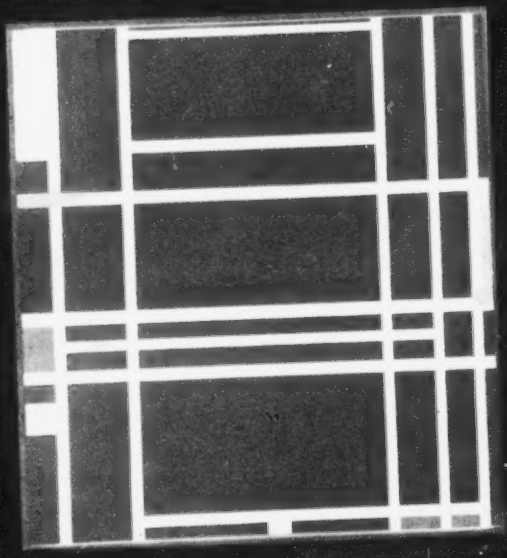


27 Square Composition in Red + White
Oil 39½ x 39" 1938-42

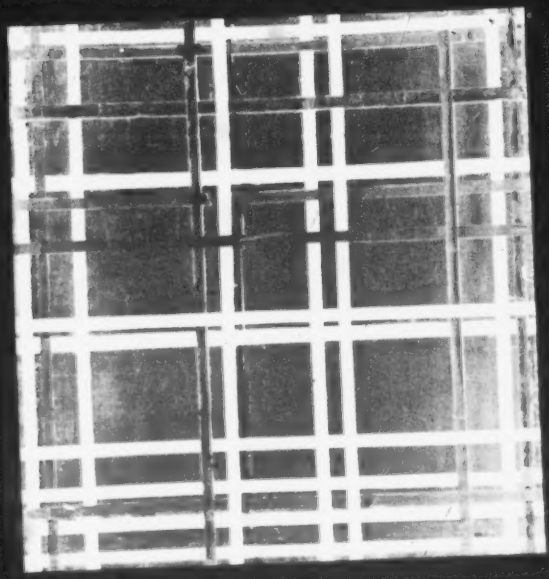
Composition in Red Yellow + Blue **28**
1939-42 Oil 28¼ x 27¼"

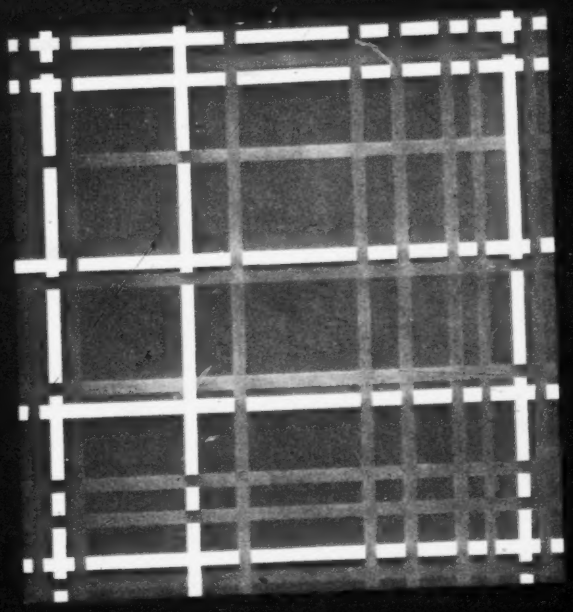


Composition 10 1939-42 **29**
Oil 31¼ x 28¼"



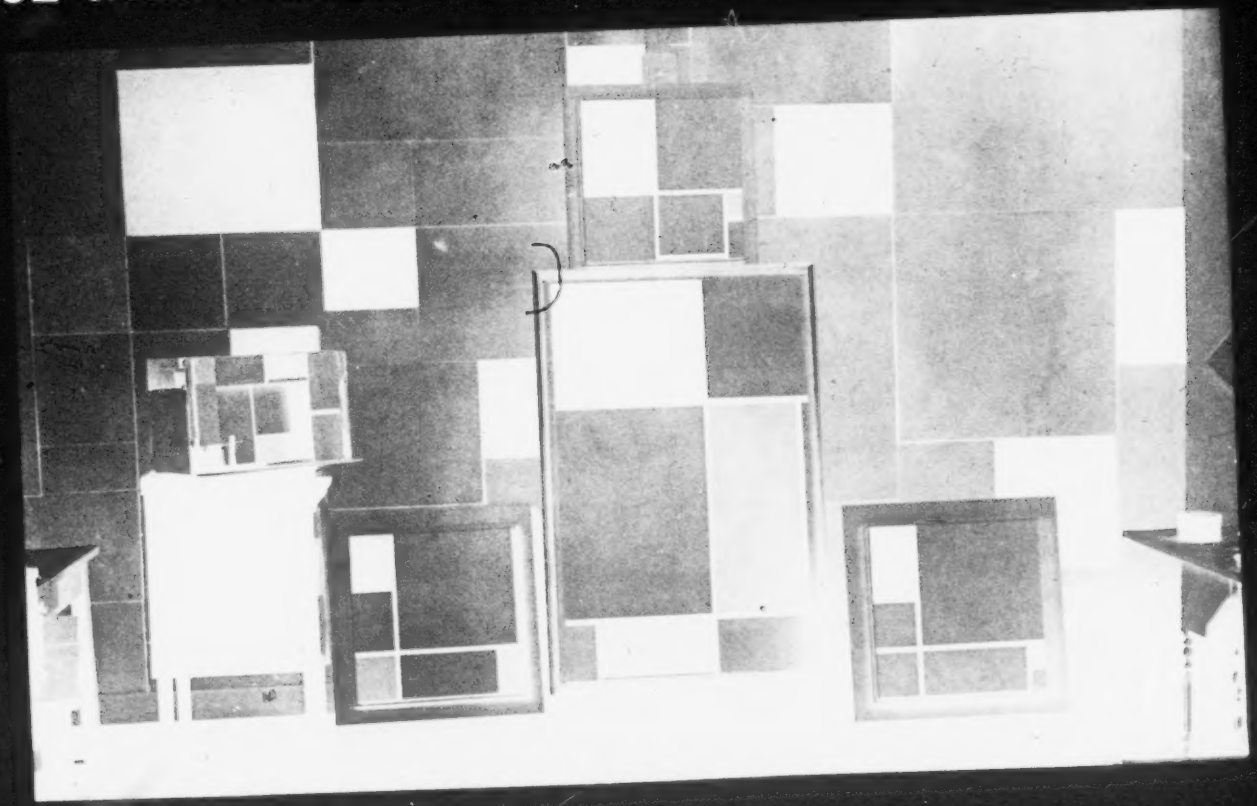
New York City 2 1942 **30**
Oil + Tape 47 x 45"





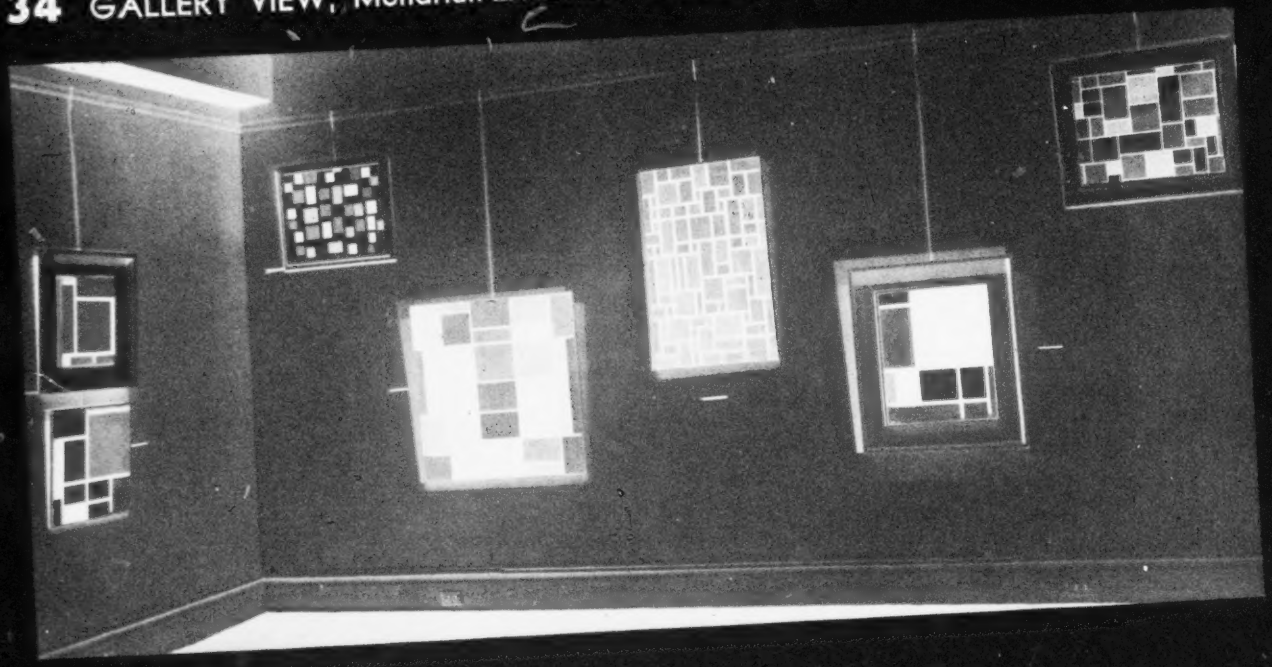
31 New York City I 1942
Oil 47 x 45"

32 STUDIO OF MONDRIAN, Paris, 1931



33 GALLERY VIEW, Mondrian Exhibition November 1953

34 GALLERY VIEW, Mondrian Exhibition February 1951



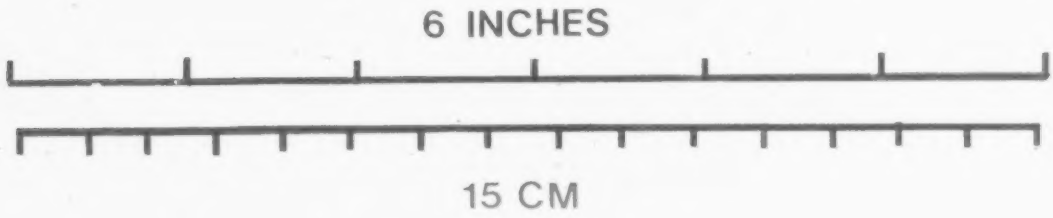
35 GALLERY VIEW, Mondrian Exhibition November 1953

36 GALLERY VIEW, Mondrian Exhibition November 1953

September 30 — November 2, 1957

MONDRIAN

Sidney Janis 15 East 57 Street, N. Y.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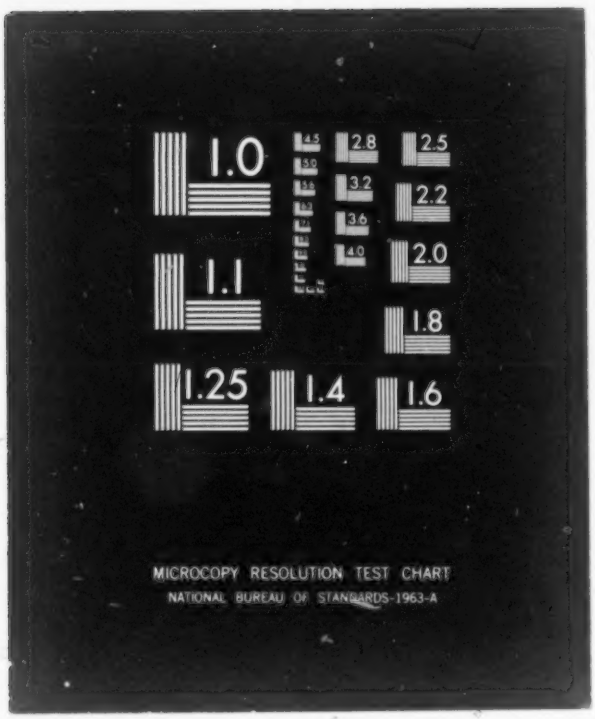
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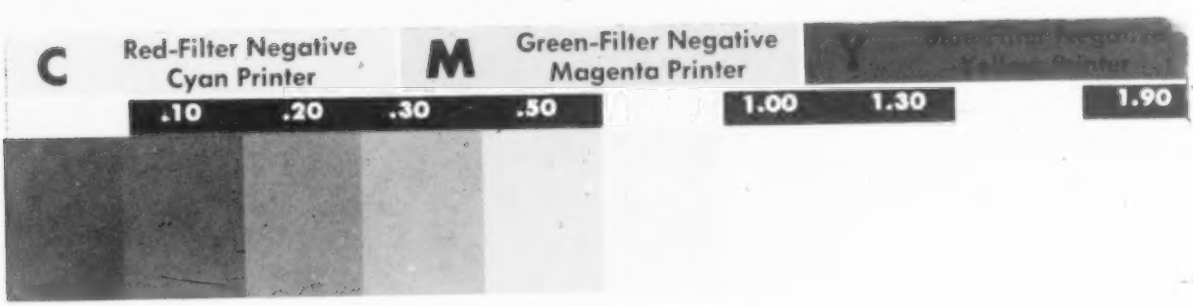
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MONDRIAN

Sidney Janis Gallery, New York 1974

COURTAULD INSTITUTE OF ART
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON
Presented by
Sidney Janis Gallery.

PAINTINGS
DRAWINGS
CONSTRUCTIONS
DOCUMENTS
MONDRIAN

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PREFACE

Piet Mondrian's Personality

Society wants little or no privacy for its heroes, alive or dead. Time's probe into the dramatic aura of greatness commands no separation between an artist's work and his personal life. It is an essential purpose of this exhibition to give an authentic glimpse into Piet Mondrian's personality.

Born in Amersfoort, at the heart of Holland, one hundred and two years ago, son of the headmaster of a school there, Mondrian is world renowned and his art established historically.

We owe to Mondrian, instrument of his epoch, 1872-1944, the conservation of the traditions of humanism and structure in western art—crystallized and transformed into the new foundations of the emerging style of our century. Revolutionary and controversial, Mondrian's painting and writing have helped bring mankind to new levels of consciousness, to new levels of expressive freedom essential to civilized progress (*progress* understood as the intensification of the humanistic in man). The evolution of his mature thought is available in some forty essays and notes. The writings are to be found among the foremost publications of his time in Holland, France, Germany, England and the United States.

Mondrian always differentiated between the purely intuitive, the universal, and the rational representation of process. He insisted that the writing always followed the direct experience of his art. It was through his painting that Mondrian realized the liberation of perception from the ancient dominating symbolistic and mimetic functions of art, toward what he called *A New Realism* (1943), to an entirely new plateau of relationship to the total environment—inseparable from the social structure of life itself.

Mondrian presaged the synthesis, the symbiosis of painting, sculpture and architecture into an entirely new expression, he saw his art as purely intuitive, as a pioneer step toward the future against the surrounding limitations of the mores, of the dominating past. "If we cannot free *ourselves*, we can free our *vision* . . . Because it is free of all utilitarian limitations, plastic art must move not only parallel with human progress but must advance ahead of it. It is the task of art to express a clear vision of reality." (*Toward the True Vision of Reality*, 1942.)

But what kind of person was Piet Mondrian?

"History" is written—and rewritten—according to variable measures, the values of those who chronicle the image of man through words, through the overwhelming power of language to reflect and shape our perception and prejudice, to prevent or to open our comprehension. Even photographs can give contradictory images, depending upon the moment and the photographer. Naturalistic or veristic description in photography can be as semantically naive as in painting or in writing. Psychologically speaking, characterizations of Mondrian's personality may reflect the measures and the values of the image-maker much more than those of Mondrian.

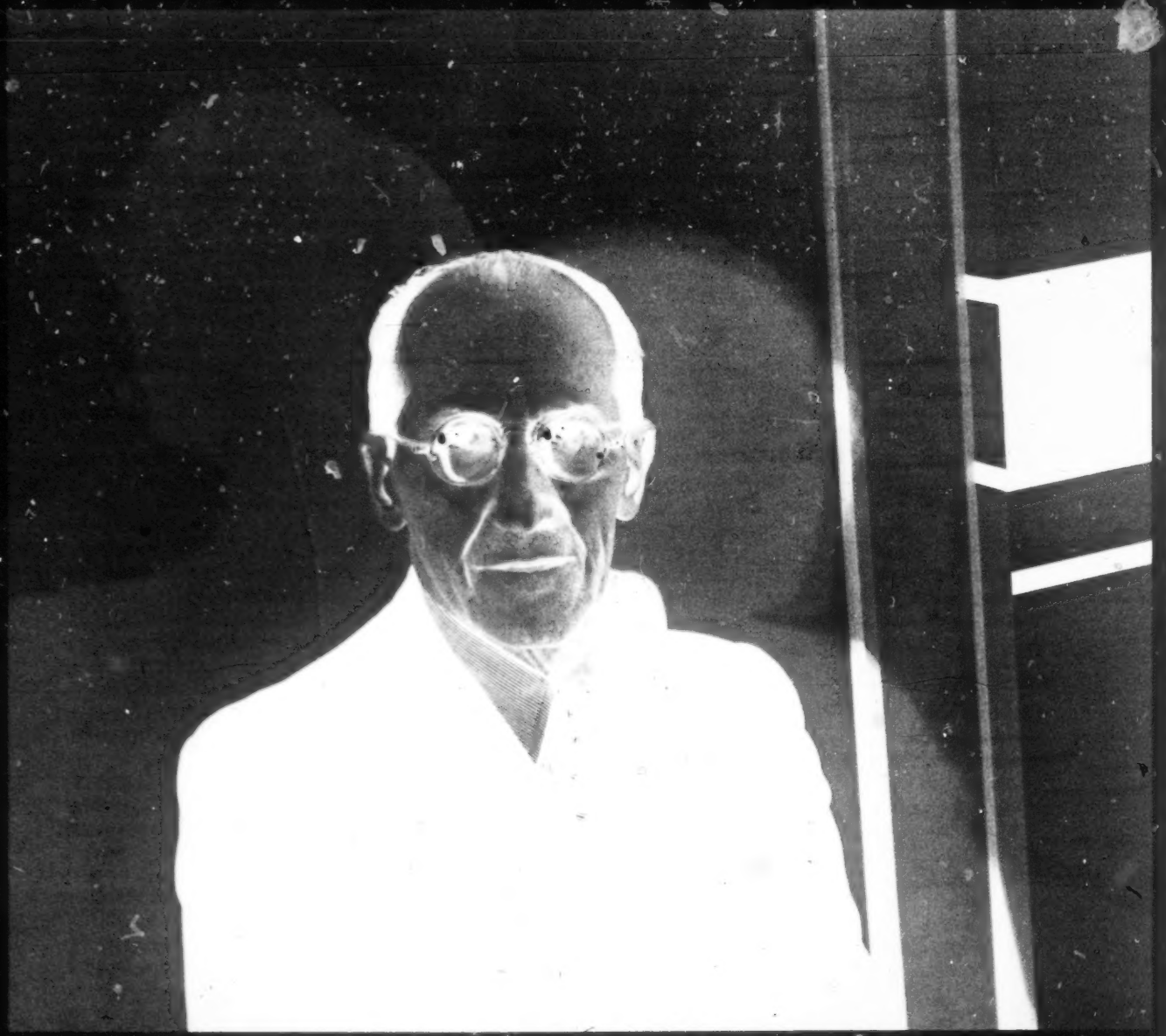
My own prejudices are based upon our close friendship during the last ten years of Mondrian's life. Until the present, the man and his work are often characterized as "ascetic," "pure," "utopian," among other adjectives. I found a direct, spontaneous, worldly, vital, unpretentious, responsive human being, completely free of *kitsch;* an eternal optimist, with undiminished curiosity and excitement toward the dynamics of social change—to which he contributed so much. One needs only to read Mondrian's writings to appreciate the broad scope of his inclusive interests.

The image of Mondrian as an ascetic or as a recluse is ludicrous, even if one merely observes the international groups, the girl friends, artists, architects, writers, museum curators, collectors, among others who claim to have known him well.

My own first meeting with Mondrian is revealing. I was twenty-two years old, completely unknown to him and unannounced when I knocked at the door of his famous studio in Paris, 26 Rue du Départ, in December of 1934. Mondrian was then sixty-two years old. When the door opened, I simply told him my name, that I was an artist and that I had come to Paris from New York especially to meet with him. After a slight pause, the calm response, "This is very unusual." "Mr. Mondrian," I said, "my French is very limited . . . I hope you will excuse my directness . . ." Hesitation for a moment and then "Please come in."

Until Paris, I had seen only three of his paintings in New York, but I had been bursting for months with thoughts and questions over their significance.

COURTAULD INSTITUTE



30 PIET MONDRIAN, New York ca. 1940

We talked for three hours without stopping; immediately we were friends. "Who would you like to meet? How can I help you?" It was through Mondrian that I first met Léger, Gabo, Pevsner, Duchamp, Hélion, Le Corbusier and a host of others.

We were together frequently during the next four months before my return to New York. When I left Paris, his parting words were, in our usual half-French half-English, "Nous sommes comme frères, if I were younger I would go with you." Afterwards we corresponded, and you can imagine my joy when my later good fortune made it possible for me to help him come to New York out of London during the terrible "blitz" bombing of 1940. Here, he frequently repeated that he had never enjoyed life so much.

Although I have no personal knowledge of his younger days, the photos show him first as romantic and then as dapper in appearance, energetic, proud and lively. It should not be forgotten than Mondrian was among the very first in Europe, perhaps anywhere, to perceive and then to write about the important contribution of Black American Jazz and its dances, all of which he enjoyed until the end of his life. In New York he was often with me and others for a "dancing party"; nobody has ever written so brilliantly about the symbolic ambience of the night-club. (*Jazz and Neo-Plastic*, 1927.) It was my pleasure, on his first night in New York, to introduce him to *Boogie-Woogie* music for the first time. His response was immediate, "Enormous!" he repeated, "Enormous!".

It is true, when I knew him, that Mondrian was not a "bon-vivant." His personal life-style was consonant with his work, which demanded great concentration of time and energy, so that his only excesses were on his painting, sometimes to the neglect of his sleep and eating habits. But he was always ready to attend a colleague's "vernissage" and to welcome a friend. He would even invite a sympathetic visitor's reaction to the painting-in-process on the easel. "Do you think this part is quite right?" he might begin . . . Few artists are ever so open.

He was witty too. One night after a party, the two of us were driving a lady friend home in a taxi. She was a famous, sophisticated collector, then the wife of a Surrealist painter, both admirers of Mondrian. As she sat between us, she cuddled herself against Mondrian's shoulder. Piet (then seventy years old) put his arm around her neck and kissed her directly, and long, on her mouth. "Why Mondrian!" she exclaimed, "I thought you were so *pure!*" Afterwards, when she left us, he laughed to me and said, "They (meaning the Surrealists) always call me so 'pure'."

On another occasion I asked Piet why it was that he had never married. He replied, "To tell you the truth, I never could afford it. Once, long ago, I did live with a girl for a time . . . But when we disagreed and we parted," he laughed, reminiscing with mock indignation, "she took *all* the furniture! . . . So! . . ."

"Utopian," observes a scholar, often is used pejoratively to describe a state of mind "incongruous with the state of reality within which it occurs." But, he continues, it is also possible to perceive "utopian" as an "orientation which transcends reality and breaks the bonds of the existing order." (Karl Mannheim: *Ideology and Utopia.*) It is now impossible to consider Mondrian's position as unrealistic.

Piet Mondrian was the sanest human being I have ever known. His personality enjoyed the luxury of the consistent unity of his philosophical values with the way he actually lived, worked and related to others. His inner and outer life was extraordinarily full, free of anything superfluous—like his paintings. Impeccably honest and responsible, he was too accepting, too understanding of differences to waste himself on the trivia of polemics, anger, bitterness or anxiety. Not that he couldn't be abrupt, opposed and firm when dissatisfied, but he was too positive (not *positivistic*), too optimistic, too detached from the market-place and the political machinations of the art world to deviate from the surety of his art and thought.

When he would encounter the common misrepresentations of his paintings and writings, he would comment with some chagrin, "They (meaning the writers) always think they know better than we (meaning the artists)." Then he would shake his head a little sadly, "Writers are the greatest criminals." Or, "Life is full of obstacles, but life is always right!"; by which he meant that one could only try to comprehend and accept the reality of the existing plurality of viewpoints, the limitations of others. He never doubted that time, education and experience would ultimately sustain the truths of his own vision, always centered in reality.

And time is showing the central force of Piet Mondrian's art and life, inseparable indeed from his personality, from his painting, from his thought, which he dedicated, printed in large letters in *Le Néo-Plasticisme, 1920,* AUX HOMMES FUTURS.*

Harry Holtzman, Lyme, Connecticut.

**From the Introduction to The New Art—The New Life: The Culture of Pure Relationships and the other essays by Piet Mondrian, to be published by Viking Press, 1974, Documents of XXth Century Art.*

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Mondrian Exhibitions Since 1966*

1969 Regina, Saskatchewan, Norman MacKenzie Art Gallery
Piet Mondrian and the Hague School of Landscape Painting
Catalogue with texts by Nancy E. Dillow and Robert Welsh
(This exhibition traveled to Edmonton and Montreal)

Paris, Orangerie des Tuileries, *Mondrian.*
Catalogue introduction by Michel Seuphor

1970 New York, Pace Gallery *Mondrian: The Process Works*
Catalogue introduction by Harry Holtzman

1971 New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum
Piet Mondrian, 1872-1964. Centennial Exhibition.
Catalogue with texts by Dr. L. J. F. Wijsenbeek, Joop Joosten, Nelly van Doesburg, Max Bill, Charmion von Wiegand.

New York, Noah Goldowsky Gallery *The Early Works of Piet Mondrian*
Catalogue text by Robert P. Welsh

1973 Amersfoort, Zonnenhof *Piet Mondrian: een Dokumentatie*
Catalogue texts by Harry Holtzman and J. L. Locher

**List of Mondrian Exhibitions to 1966 will be found in Art Gallery of Toronto, Piet Mondrian: 1872-1944, 1966 (exhibition catalogue).*

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Merz Hannover 1923-1932.
Bulletin de l'Effort Moderne, Paris 1924-1927
Manomètre, Lyon 1922-1928
L'Architecture Vivante, Paris 1923-1928
Bauhausbücher, Munich 1925-1930
Vouloir, Lille 1924-1927
Cahiers d'Art, Paris 1926-1960
i 10 Holland, 1927-1929
Cercle et Carré, Paris 1930
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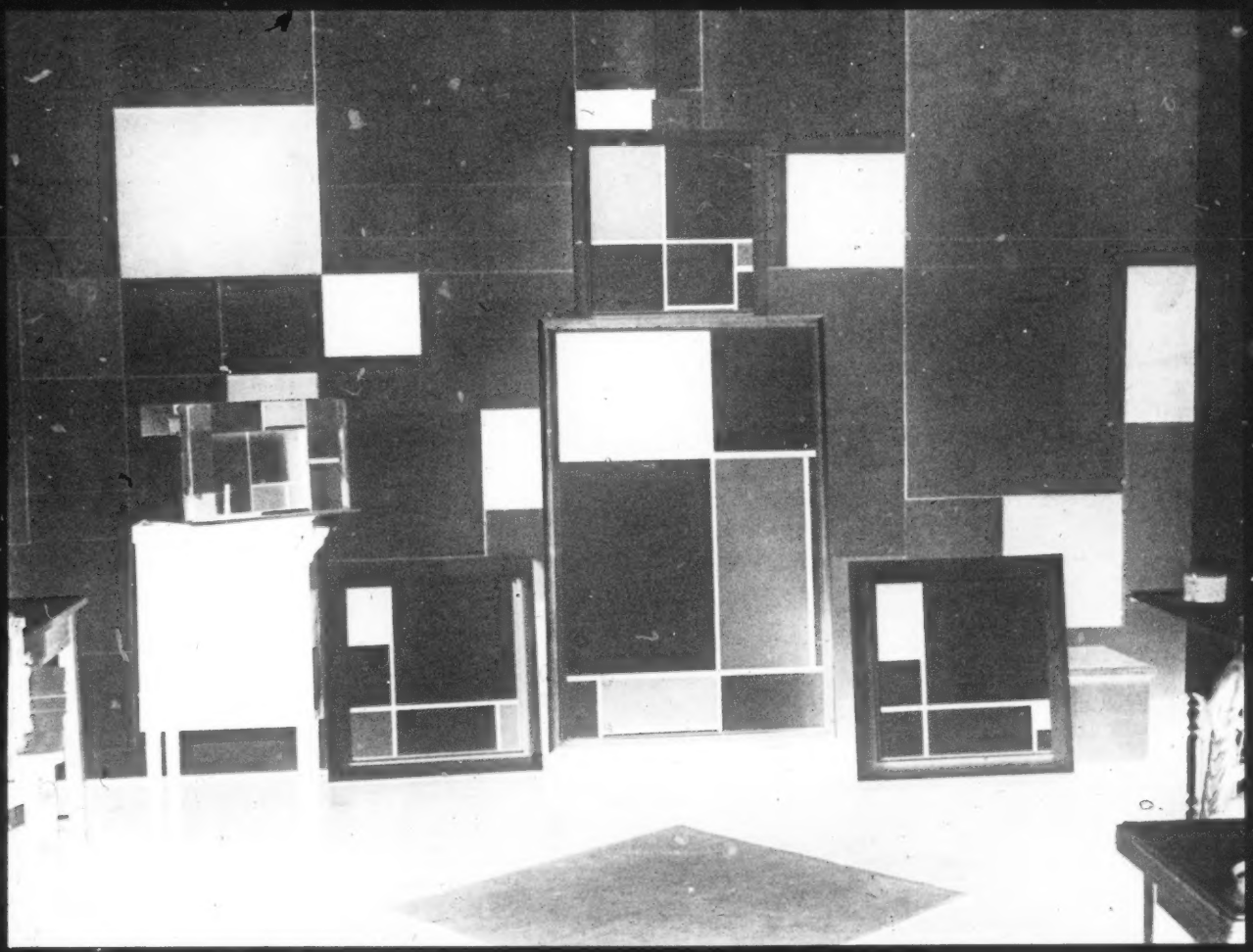
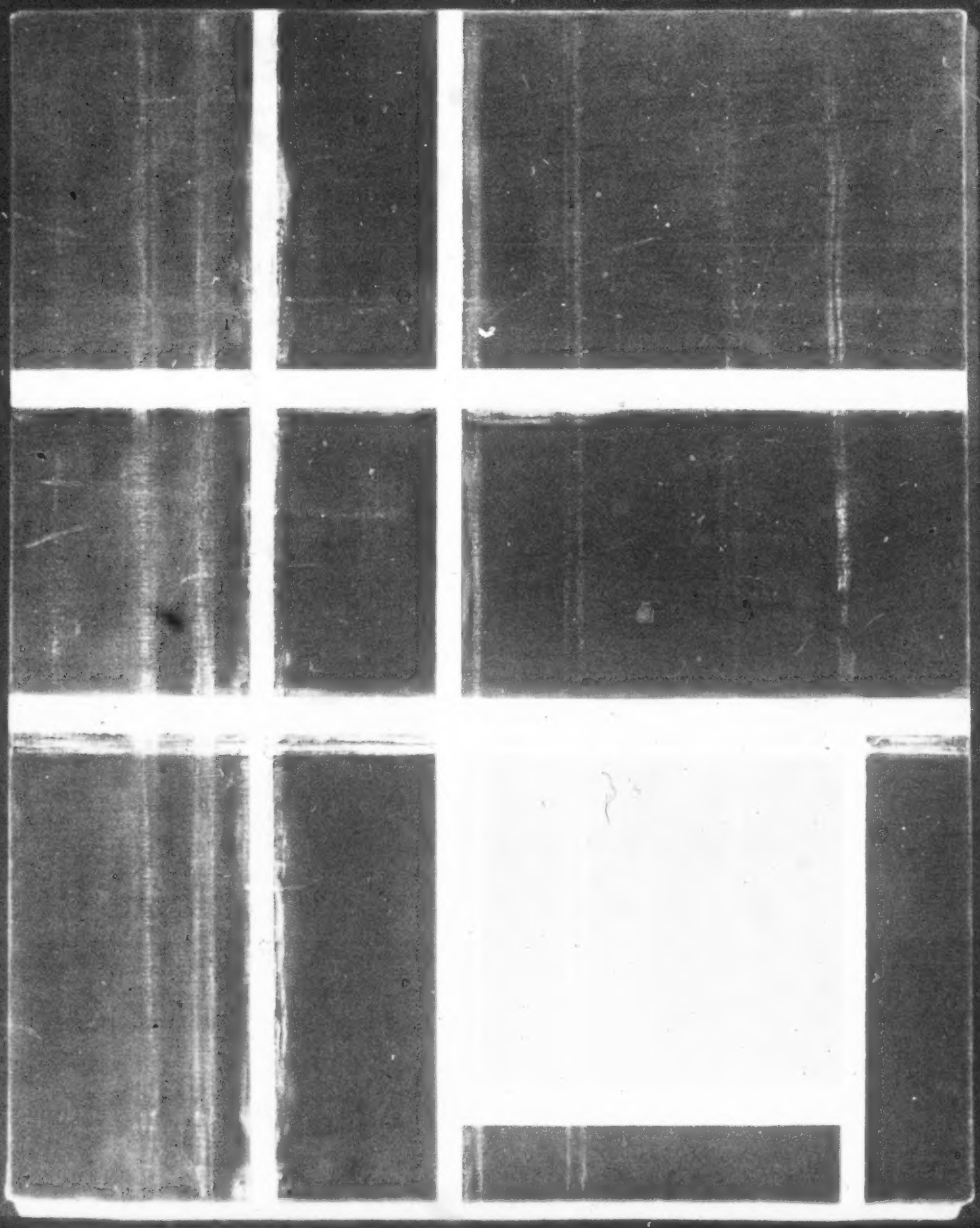
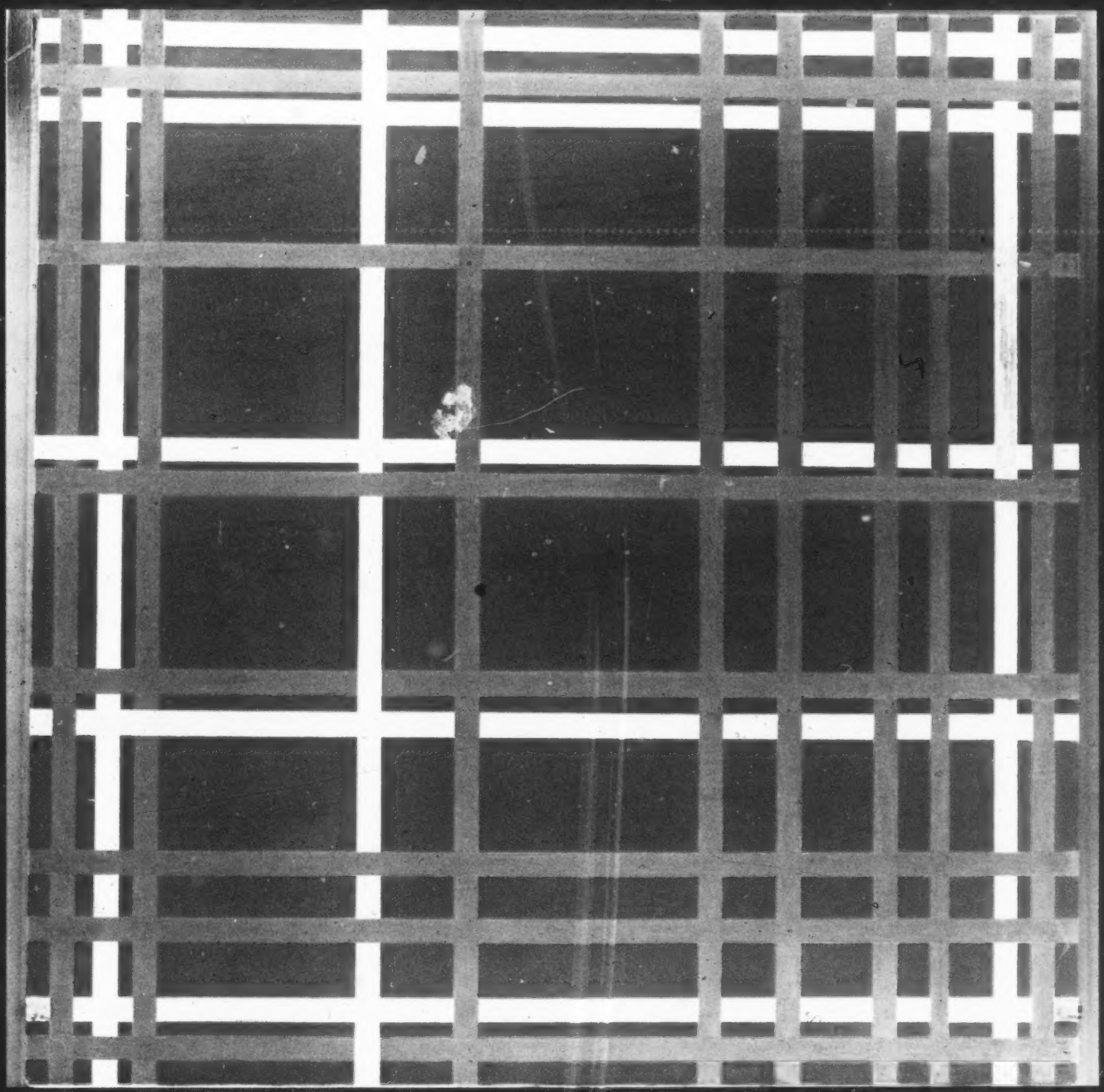


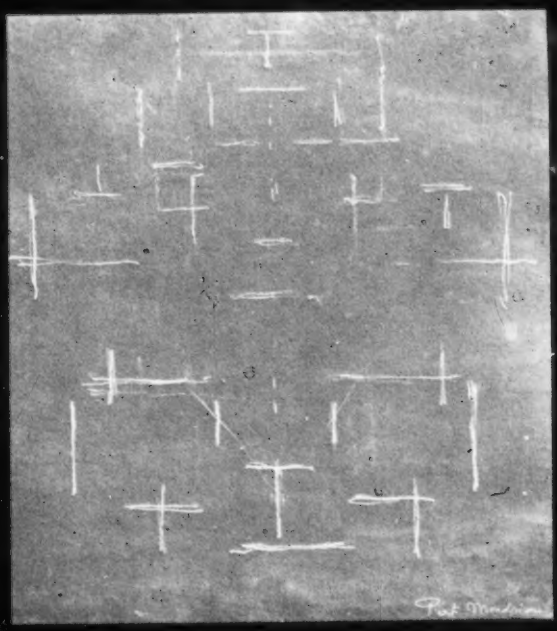
THE ARTIST'S STUDIO, PARIS ca. 1930



5 COMPOSITION 1938-44 (unfinished)

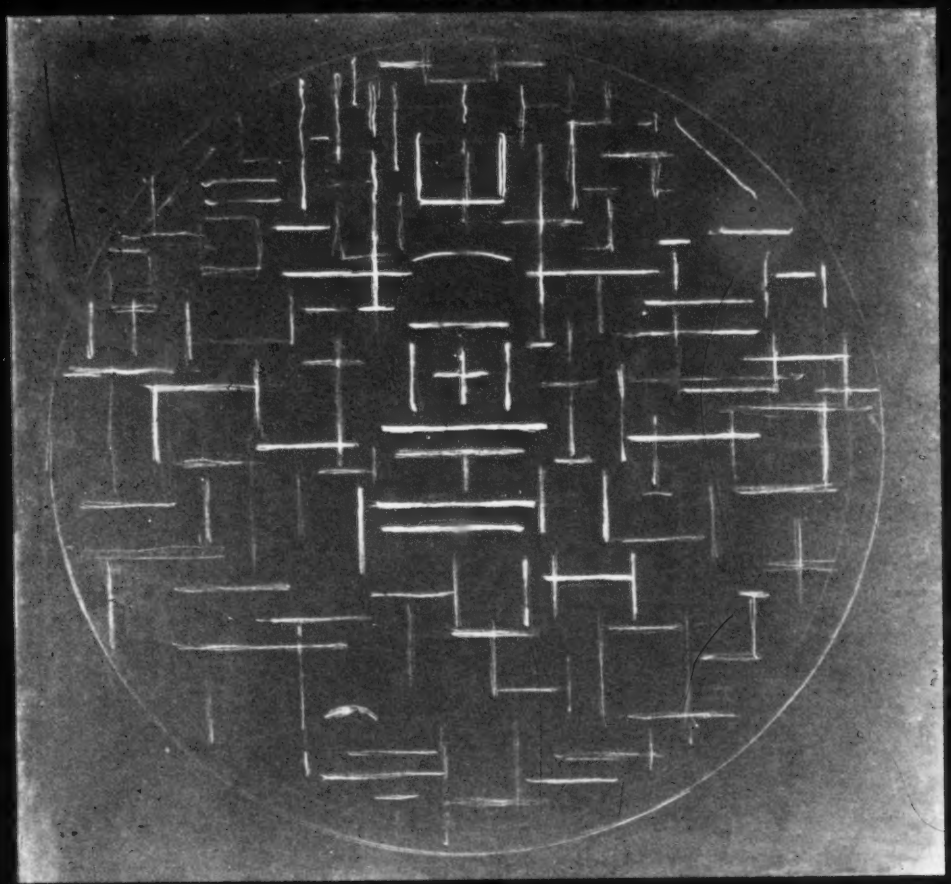


8 NEW YORK CITY I 1942



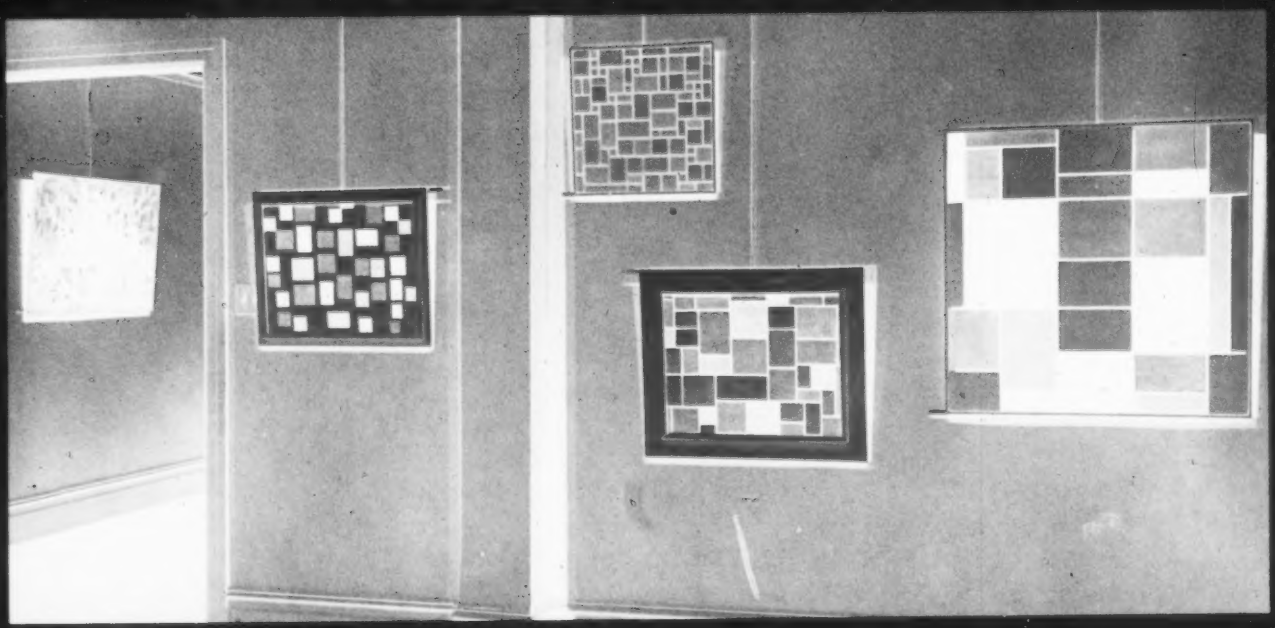
3 STUDY, Plus & Minus 1914

1 CHURCH FACADE, Plus & Minus 1913



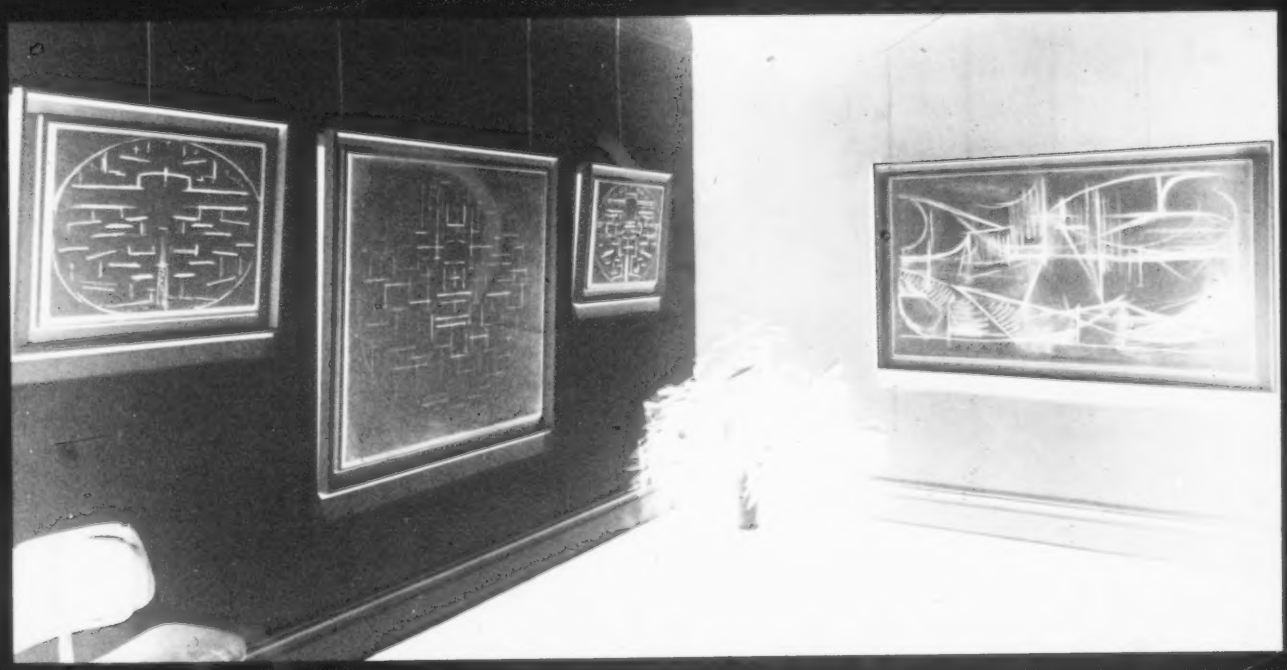
257 VIEW MONDRIAN EXHIBITION, November 1949

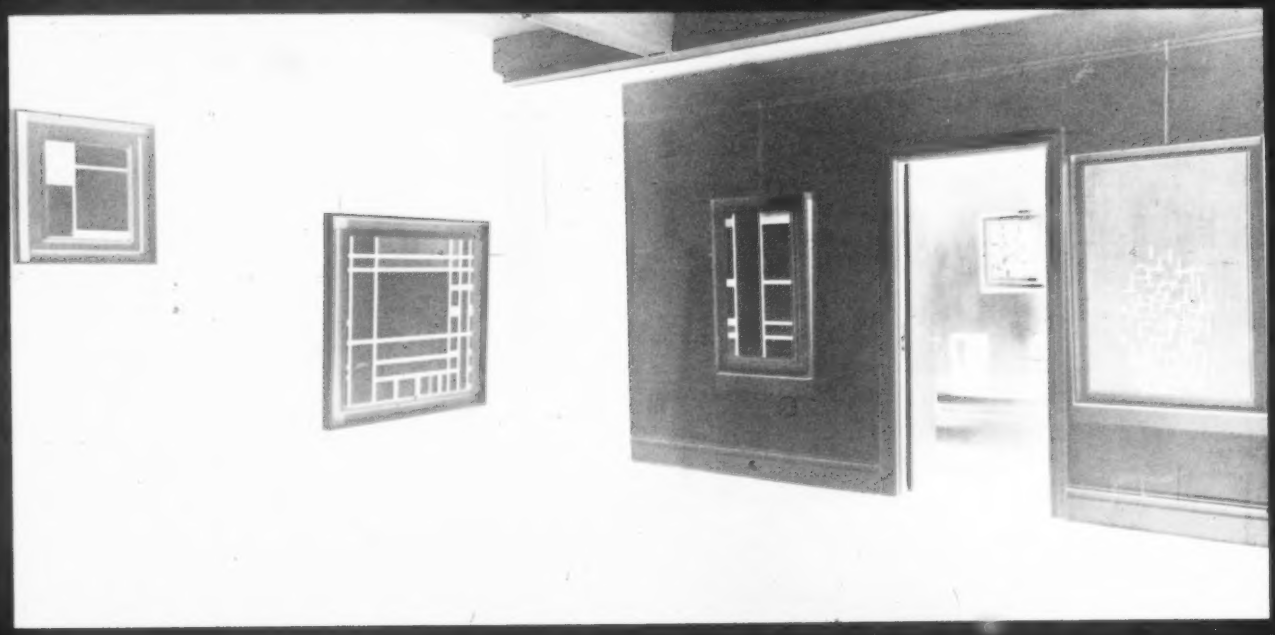
258 VIEW MONDRIAN EXHIBITION, February-March 1951



259 VIEW MONDRIAN EXHIBITION, November 1953

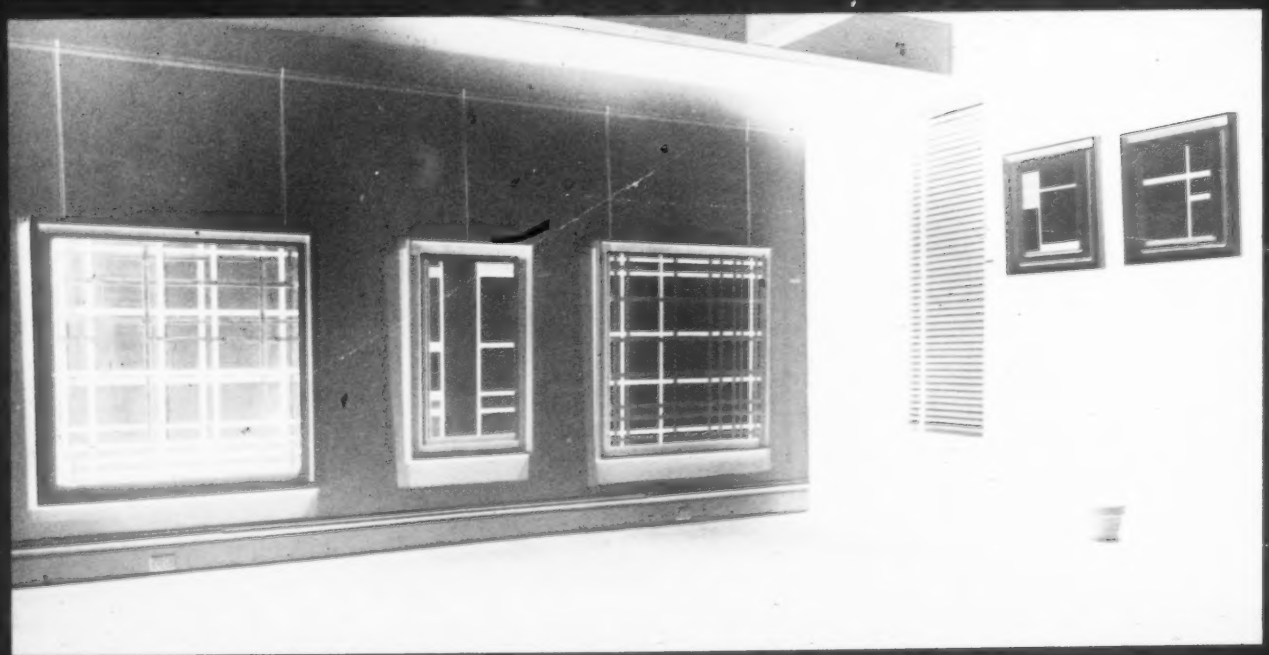
263 VIEW MONDRIAN EXHIBITION, November 1963

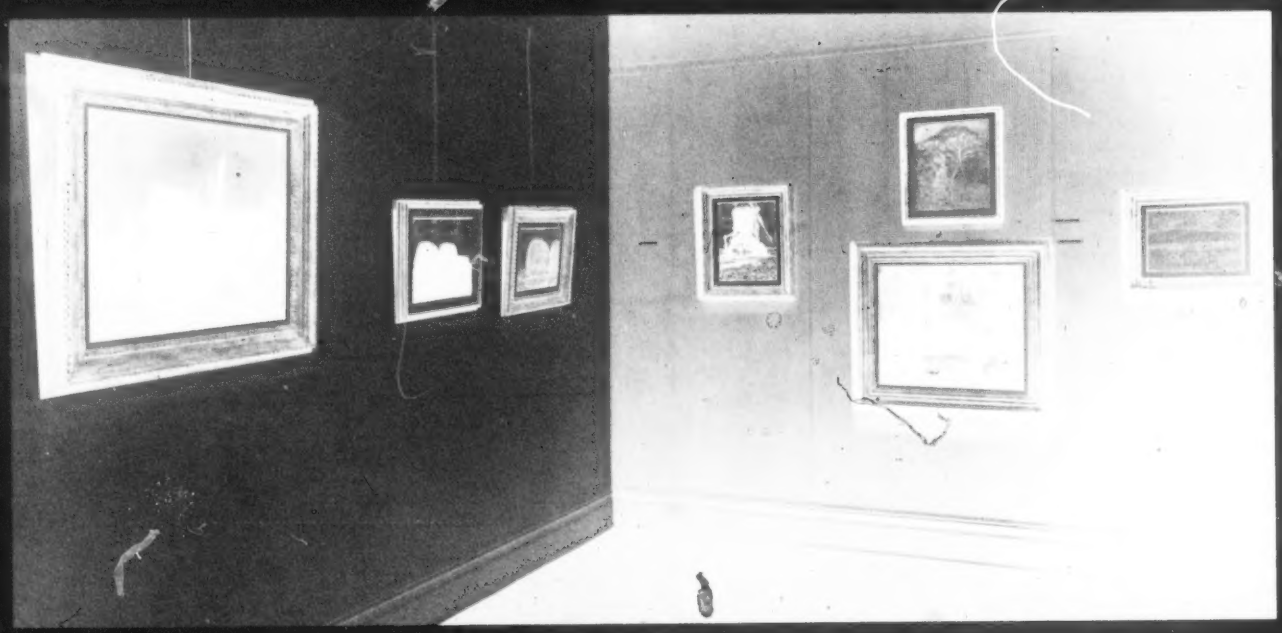




261 VIEW MONDRIAN EXHIBITION, January 1962

260 VIEW MONDRIAN EXHIBITION, October 1957





262 VIEW MONDRIAN EXHIBITION, January 1962

264 VIEW MONDRIAN EXHIBITION, November 1963

CATALOGUE

1 *__Church Facade, Plus & Minus__ 1913 Charcoal on paper 43¾ x 4

2 __Pier and Ocean__ 1914 Charcoal & India Ink on paper 19¾ x 17

3 *__Study, Plus & Minus__ 1914 Charcoal on paper 19¾ x 17½"
Collection: Harry Holtzman

4 __Composition: Plus & Minus Study__ 1916 Oil & pencil on canvas 49 x 29" (unfinished)

5 *__Composition__ 1938-44 Charcoal on canvas 27½ x 28½" (unfinished)

6 __Composition Study__ ca. 1940 Pencil on paper 8 x 8"
Collection: Harry Holtzman

7 __Sketch__ ca. 1940 Pencil on board 4 x 4"
Collection: Harry Holtzman

8 *__New York City I__ 1942 Oil on canvas 47 x 45"

9 __New York City II__ 1942-44 Oil & Tape on canvas 45 x 47" (unfinished)

10 __New York City III__ 1942-44 Oil & Tape on canvas 45 x 39" (unfinished)

11 __Table__ 29½ x 27½ x 25½" (designed and constructed by the A

12 __Table__ 30 x 28 x 24" (designed and constructed by the Artist)

13-75 Photographs of Mondrian, his family, his friends, his studio

76-100 Official Documents

101-138 Manuscripts

139-197 Books, Catalogues and Gramaphone Records

198-214 Printings

**Reproduced*

215-224 Typescripts

225-246 Artist's Equipment

247-255 Mondrian, his Studio (Blow-up photographs)

256 Mondrian's New York Studio 1944 Film by Harry Holtzman

Views of Mondrian Exhibitions at the Gallery

257 *Piet Mondrian: Paintings 1910—1944, November 1949

258 *Piet Mondrian, February-March 1951

259 *50 Years of Mondrian, November 1953

260 *Mondrian, October 1957

261-262 *Paintings by Mondrian, Early and Late and Work in Process, January 1962

263-264 *Paintings, Drawings and Watercolors by Piet Mondrian, November 1963

THE GALLERY gratefully acknowledges its debt to Harry Holtzman for his devoted efforts as guest-director in assembling of the exhibition. Thanks as well go to Martin James for compiling the bibliography, and to Kees Broos, Herbert Henkels, Dr. R. R. de Haas, Peter Reurslag and Gemeentemuseum, The Hague, for their valuable assistance and cooperation.

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